



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Statement by the Honourable Abdelwahad Radi President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

United Nations General Assembly

Agenda item 130: Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Mr. President,

It is a great honor for me to address the General Assembly for the first time, in my new capacity as President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. In so doing, I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Speaker Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia, who also served as President of the UN General Assembly at its 54th session, for his vision and hard work. I myself pledge to spare no efforts in continuing to enhance the interaction between the United Nations, parliaments and the IPU.

Ten years ago, in the fall of 2002, the IPU was granted permanent observer status with the UN General Assembly. We have come a long way since then. The most recent report of the UN Secretary-General, which has been prepared for our discussion today, bears testimony to what together we have been able to achieve. Allow me to refer to just a few aspects of our engagement.

More and more, parliaments and parliamentarians are playing an active role in the implementation of international commitments. Perhaps one of the most systematic forms in which this is taking place is in the context of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The IPU works with the parliaments of the countries under review so that they can take part in the review process, provide input to the national report, attend the session of the CEDAW Committee and receive the UN findings for consideration and action by parliament. As a result, the CEDAW Committee now systematically monitors the level of parliamentary involvement in the reporting process, and receives IPU reports at each of its sessions. Based on this experience, we are keen to develop similar forms of engagement with other UN Treaty Bodies, as well as with the UN Human Rights Council, particularly in the context of the Universal Periodic Review.

Over the years, we have also been working to help develop a meaningful parliamentary component to major UN processes. The parliamentary track to the UN Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) last year has been one of our most successful forms of engagement. Parliaments in many LDCs were directly involved in and provided input to the national progress reviews of the original Brussels Programme of Action. The IPU also held consultations with MPs to garner their views on the new agreement for the 2011-2020 decade, and helped to channel this input through the UN process. The Parliamentary Forum held during the Istanbul Conference was well attended and helped build political support for the new Istanbul Programme of Action (IPOA). A five-year joint UN-IPU project proposal to support the mainstreaming of the IPOA through parliaments has been developed, which we hope to start implementing soon.

Every year, in close cooperation with the Office of the President of the UN General Assembly, we have been convening a joint Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations. This has provided a unique venue for legislators to engage with senior UN officials, permanent representatives and academics on issues that are high on the global agenda. We are pleased to see that the draft resolution before you today calls for this annual parliamentary hearing at the UN to be more closely linked to major UN processes, so as to help inform these from a parliamentary perspective. We look forward to working together in this direction.

The Report of the UN Secretary-General also refers to the nature of the relationship between the UN system and parliaments at the national level. All too often, we have observed that parliaments are viewed by development partners primarily as recipients of technical assistance, and less as political players with a voice on matters relating to national development strategies or budget oversight. This needs to change. If we are serious about democratic governance, then parliaments need to be acknowledged, respected and included

in the national consultations on matters of crucial interest for the citizens they were elected to represent.

Mr. President,

I myself come from a region that is undergoing fundamental changes towards greater political transparency and accountability. The core mission of the IPU is to promote democracy and help build strong parliaments. Just over this past year, from Egypt to Tunisia, Bahrain to Libya and to Oman, the IPU has been reaching out and responding to requests from these countries to help strengthen their parliamentary capacities. In so doing, the IPU does not act alone, but brings with it the talent and expertise of its member parliaments. We welcome the fact the General Assembly calls for greater coherence and closer cooperation between the UN and the IPU in support of parliamentary institutions, particularly in countries emerging from conflict and/or in transition to democracy.

I think we all agree that there is a real need for greater transparency and accountability, at both the national and international levels. As far as the United Nations is concerned, it has been gradually opening up to other major stakeholders, in particular civil society and the private sector. This has helped to partially address the challenge of the democracy gap in international relations. We believe that the enhanced partnership with the IPU has also brought its own contribution, helping to make UN work better known and more accessible to legislators, while at the same time allowing for a certain measure of parliamentary scrutiny and oversight.

As far as we are concerned, we see the cooperation between the United Nations and the IPU as a two-way relationship. We see it as a partnership that is mutually beneficial, and mutually reinforcing. We still have a lot of work to do, but we feel that we are on the right track in developing a parliamentary dimension to the work of the UN. As we look ahead, we look forward to working with the UN Chief Executives Board in building greater coherence in our related initiatives, and to revising the Cooperation Agreement between our two organizations, which is vastly outdated.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, I would like to thank Ambassador Loulichki and the Permanent Mission of Morocco for leading the consultations with member States and tabling a substantive and forward-looking Resolution. I would also like to thank all the Missions that have sponsored this draft, and in particular those Missions that have taken the time to participate in this discussion today. We and our member parliaments greatly value this relationship, and we are committed to working hard in strengthening the UN as the cornerstone of international cooperation, while at the same time helping to bring a greater parliamentary contribution to the major issues facing the global community.

Thank you.